THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

RECORDS OF EARLY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE AS SOURCE MATERIAL

EDITED BY RUSSELL F. WHITEHEAD, A·I·A

VOLUME XX

MONOGRAPH THREE

A Group of Eastern Massachusetts Vestibules

BY BENJAMIN H. NEWTON

Research and Measured Drawings by Frank Chouteau Brown
Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

There is one important detail of the old Colonial house, that is rather seldom utilized by modern architects when designing a dwelling in this style —and that is the vestibule entrance, as distinct from the more conventional entrance porch. The rather late type of doorway, with side lights, under a narrow porch, is used over and over again; but the modern house designer has rather strangely overlooked the very practical projecting entrance vestibule found on many houses of early New England architecture, generally indicating a date earlier than the more open porch treatment with columns.

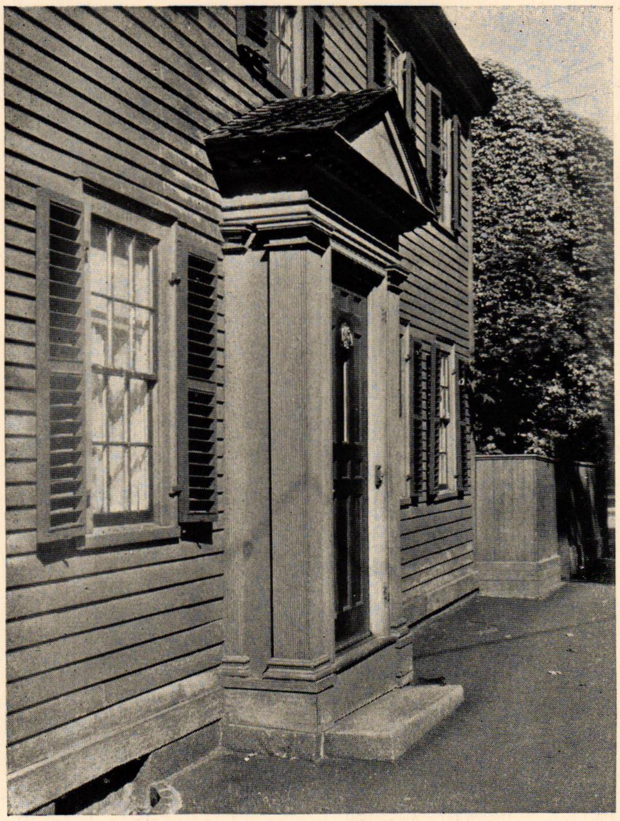
Yet this type of vestibule possesses a most practical means of enlarging a house plan, at precisely that point where it is often most crowded, and in the simplest and most economical way!

Probably it originally took shape from the need of meeting the demand for a larger entrance hall, with more space between entrance door and staircase. Particularly with the typical early Colonial stairway, placed against the front face of the large central chimney, the resulting passageway between the front room doors upon the first floor plan often became both narrow and crowded. When open, the door edge almost brushed the face of the stair run,—and there was little room to greet entering neighbors, particularly if they were to be welcomed within the room on that side of the house where the front door was hinged!

It was probable also that, despite the fact that the early houses were usually built with their entrance sides facing the south; this single doorway, opening directly into the front hall at the foot of the main stairs, was found to cool off the passage between the main front rooms of the house, upon both floors—especially when the house plan was changed to more nearly face the east or west; as came so frequently later to be the case.

We have also the early meeting house plan, with its one or two story vestibule—often inclosing the staircase as well—which was usually first treated as a gabled projection in its exterior handling;—until it came to be taken into the lower stories of the tower with spire, that came into general use at about the period of the building of the "Old North," or Christ Church of Boston, shown in Monograph Two—Volume XX. Here this distinctive "vestibule" type of entrance treatment had already taken a definitive form of expression—as is indicated by the original brick side vestibule upon the Old South Meeting House, on Washington Street, in that same city.

And so it was an easy step to widen the passageway across the front of the entrance hall, by taking out the front wall between the two posts that always supported the heavy timbers that framed the central chimney, and moving the doorway and wall forward some three to four feet, then filling in the two sides back to the main wall face of the house, and roofing it over either with a ridge roof forming a pediment gable upon the vestibule face, or with a simple hip roof treatment, the latter being often more appropriate to the older and simpler type of early house design.



VESTIBULE—25 FLINT STREET
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

In a large majority of instances, these entrance house vestibules were a later addition or alteration made to an older house plan. It is very rarely indeed that it can be indisputably proved that this sort of vestibule was original to the Colonial plan! Usually it is obviously a later afterthought, added to the plan to make it more habitable for the occupants during the colder seasons of the year. And it was almost always added to secure additional needed space within the hall itself. It was very rarely filled with inside coat closets; that is, in the older house plan!

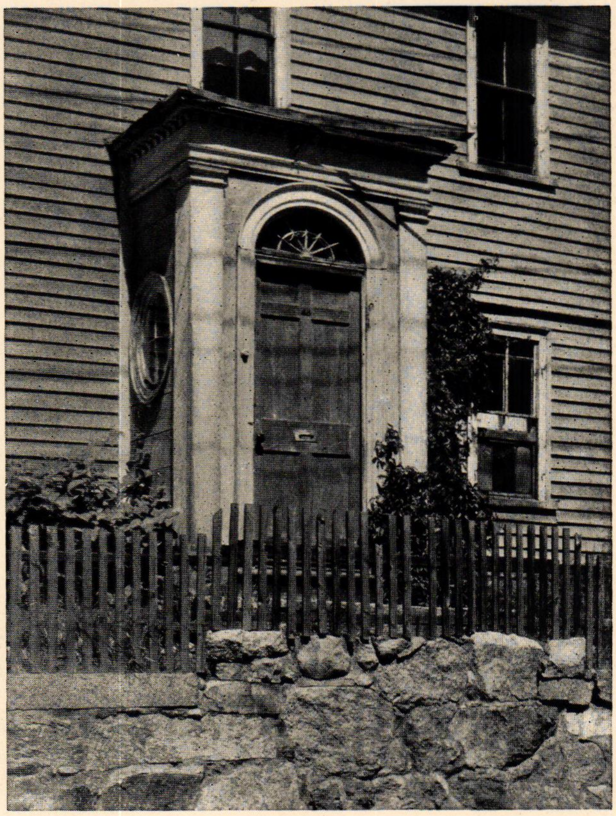
In the Bedford house, indeed, the two-story vestibule shown upon the side of the house (Page 128—Monograph Two—Volume XX) was added apparently for the purpose of securing a small, narrow staircase from the side door to the upper story; which stairway mounts steeply along the rear or righthand side of the vestibule, over small first floor closets, to the floor above. But this is an exceptional example, with a very rarely used two-story height for this feature, found in a rather late house plan.

The one factor of the outer vestibule that often deceives the casual observer is the entrance doorway, which is generally very obviously old. And it often does not occur to one to think how easily the old doorway (and in fact, whole front wall of the hallway, between the two upright posts) could be cut out and moved forward, to secure the wider hallway,— and that exactly in the single space where this enlargement of the plan was alone desired;—and where it could be easily secured, without causing the slightest change in anything in the rest of the house.

Sometimes the line where the old plaster was joined to the new wall on the inside of the side walls, shows up very distinctly. Sometimes it is entirely lost because of the manner in which the new side walls of the vestibule are finished around and up to the two main house wall posts that are found placed in these locations. Occasionally, in houses built later than 1780 or 1800, these vestibules may have been part of the original house design; but when found on any building earlier than these dates, there is usually reason to doubt that the vestibule is as old as the house.

Sometimes, in tearing down or altering an old house, the attachment of these vestibules to the house, and particularly in their under-floor and roof construction, becomes definite and plain. The basement wall usually runs right across the space under the vestibule floor, with its exterior underpinning plainly in view. The floor sill, also, is found to butt up against the exterior face of the original house sill, and the plates and rafters are clearly placed against the upper part of the exterior wall face,—often without even removing the clapboards or wall boarding. In these cases there can be no doubt. In the old Dillaway-Thomas house in Roxbury, for instance, built in 1750-52, the side entrance vestibule was added later, probably in 1832, when other changes were known to have been made in the dwelling at the time that it came first into the possession of the Dillaway family.

This supplies a good average date for the change or addition of this outer vestibule to be made. Many



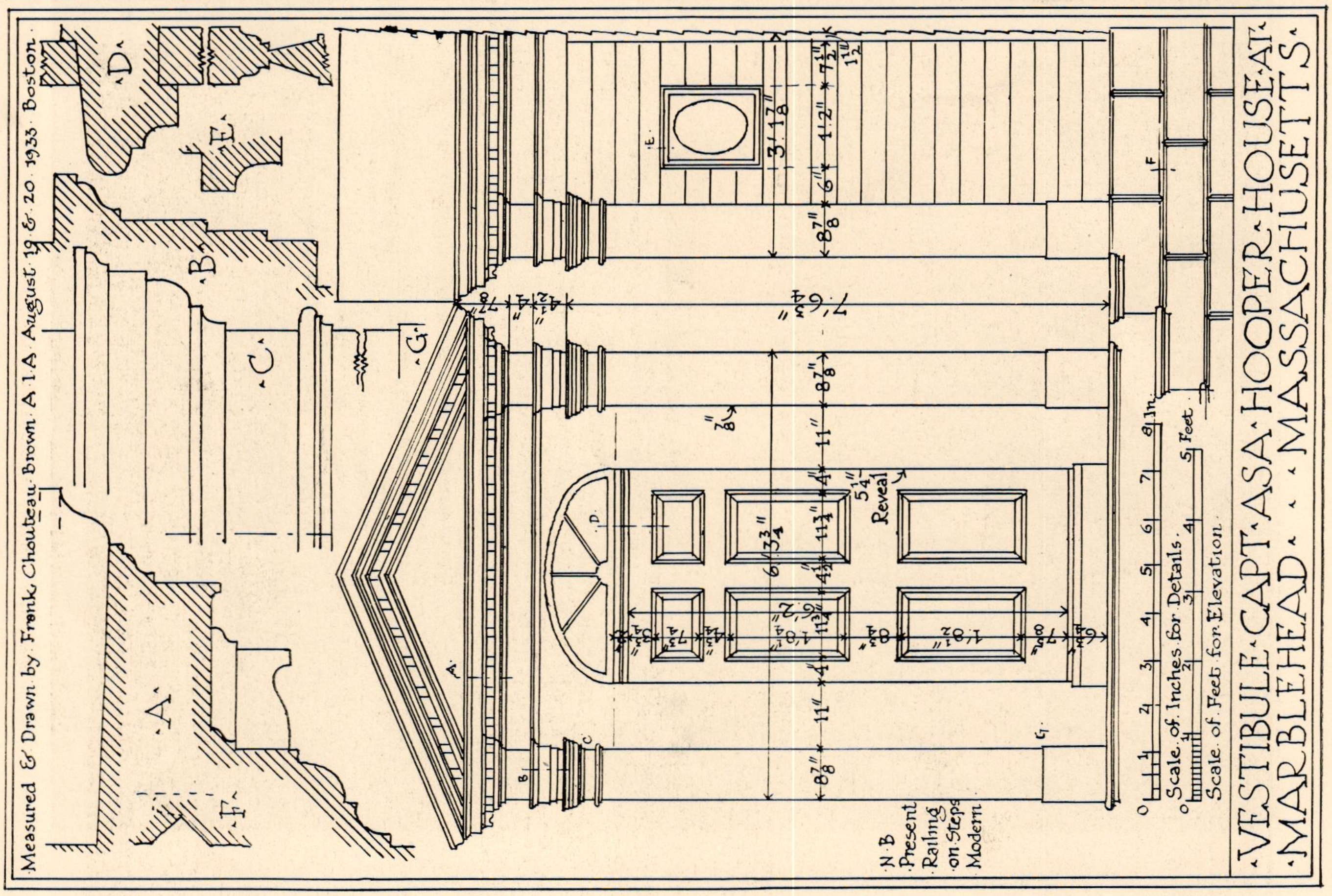
VESTIBULE—HOUSE AT GLOUCESTER
CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

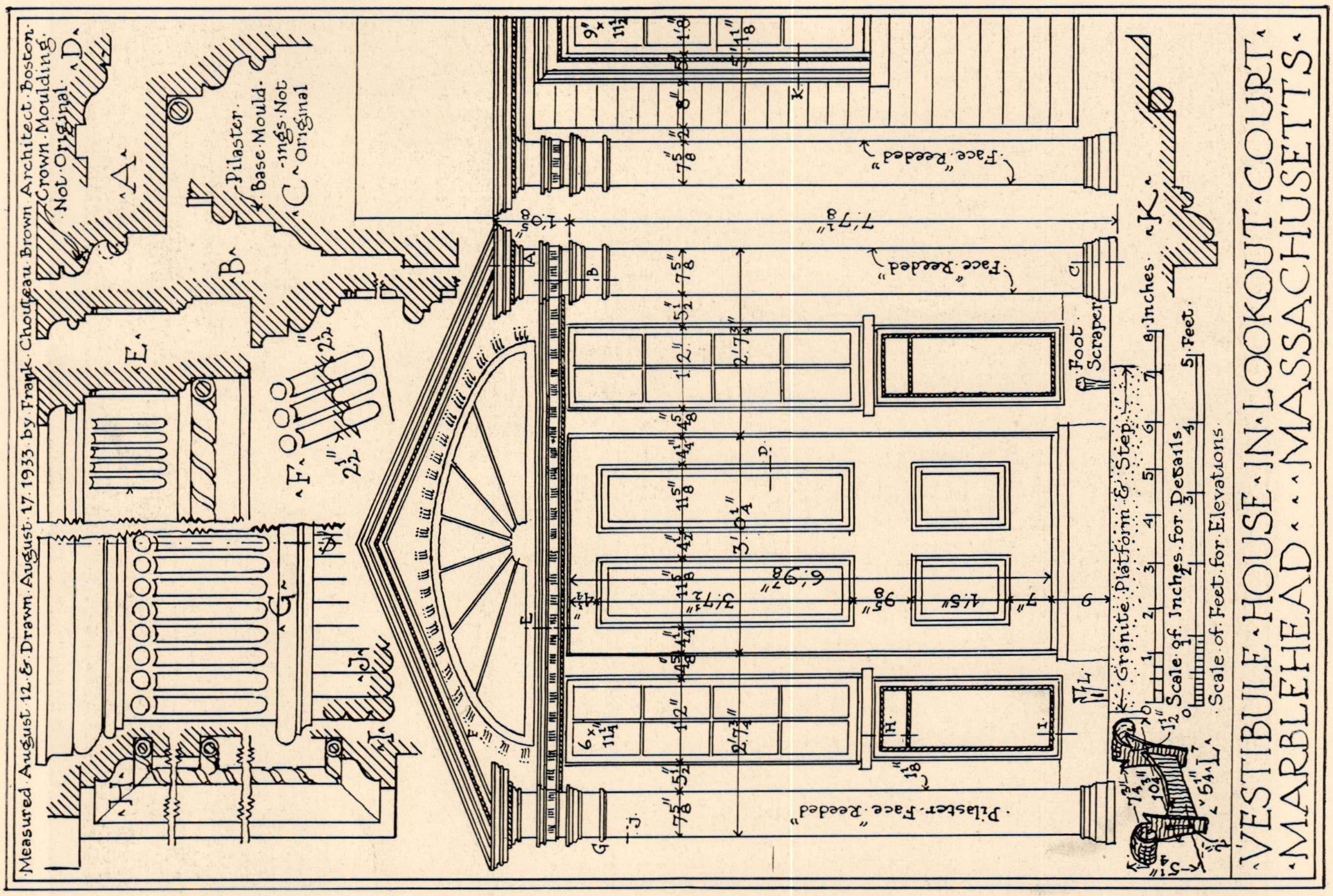
[130]



VESTIBULE—HOUSE AT 52 ESSEX STREET, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

[133]

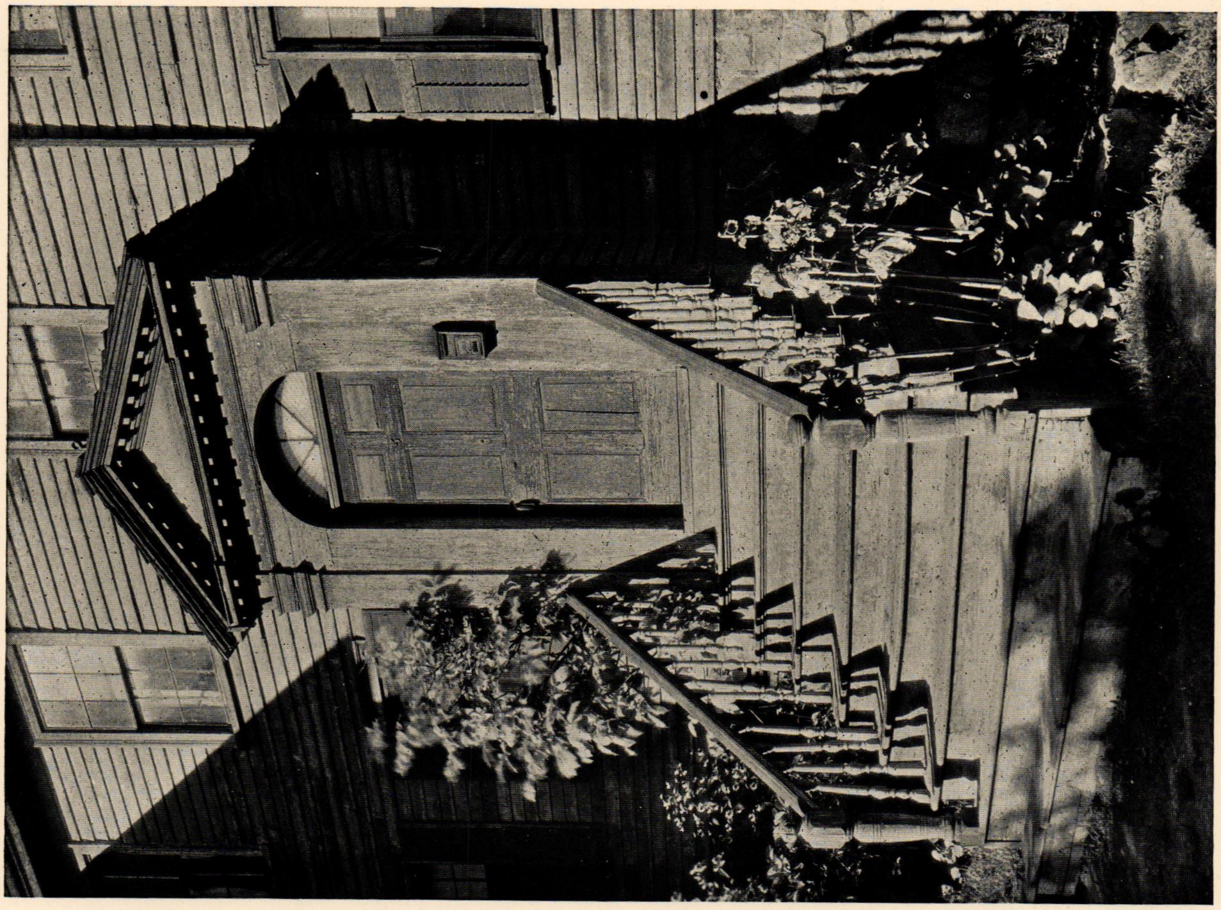

Measured & Drawn by Frank Chouteau Brown A I A August 19 & 20 1933 Boston
N.B. Present Railing on Steps Modern
Reveal
Scale of Inches for Details
Scale of Feet for Elevation
VESTIBULE CAPT ASA HOOPER HOUSE AT MARBLEHEAD MASSACHUSETTS


Measured August 12 & Drawn August 17 1933 by Frank Chouteau Brown Architect Boston
Crown Moulding Not Original
Pilaster Base Mould-ings Not Original
Face "Reeded"
Pilaster Face "Reeded"
Foot Scraper
Granite Platform & Step
Scale of Inches for Details
Scale of Feet for Elevations
VESTIBULE HOUSE IN LOOKOUT COURT MARBLEHEAD MASSACHUSETTS

[134]



VESTIBULE—HOUSE IN LOOKOUT COURT
MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS

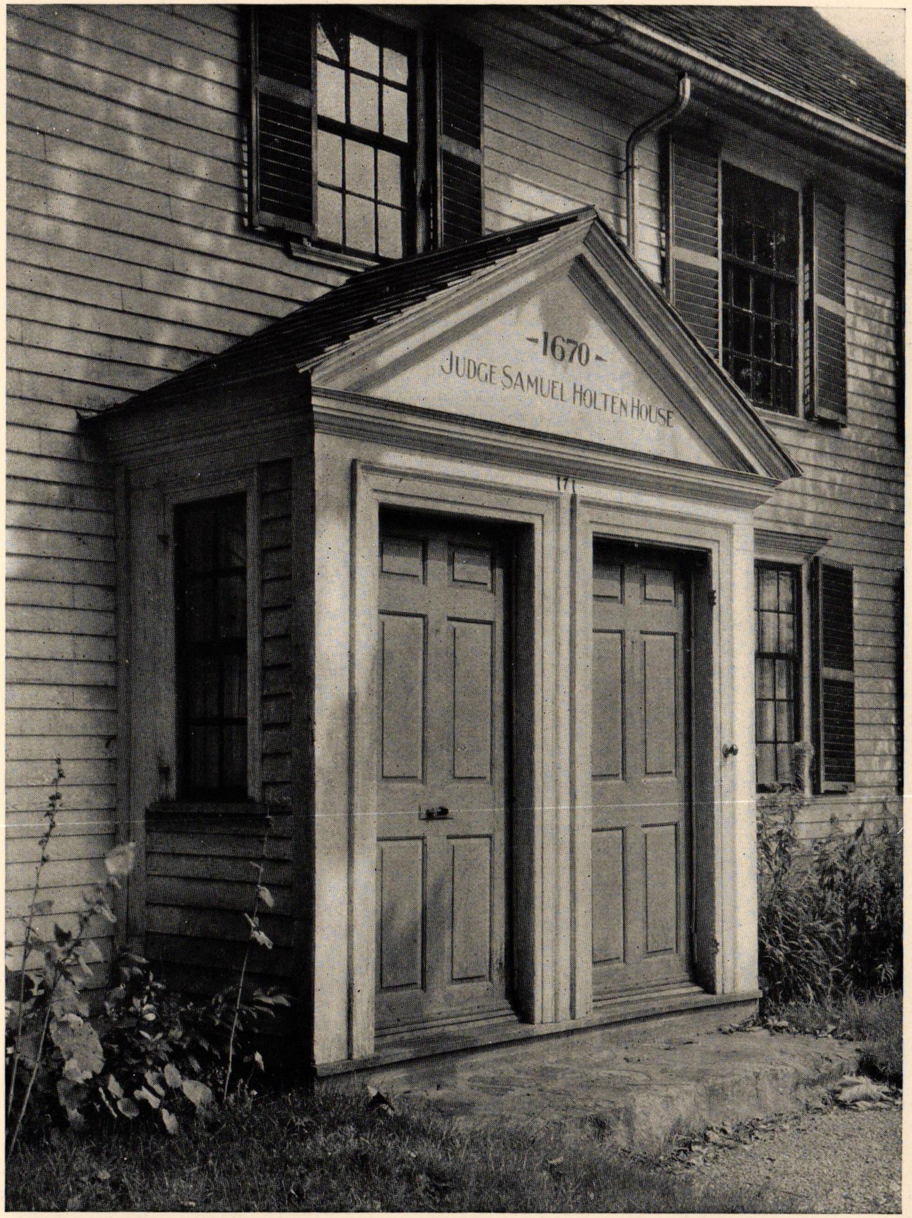


VESTIBULE—CAPT. ASA HOOPER HOUSE
MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS

[135]

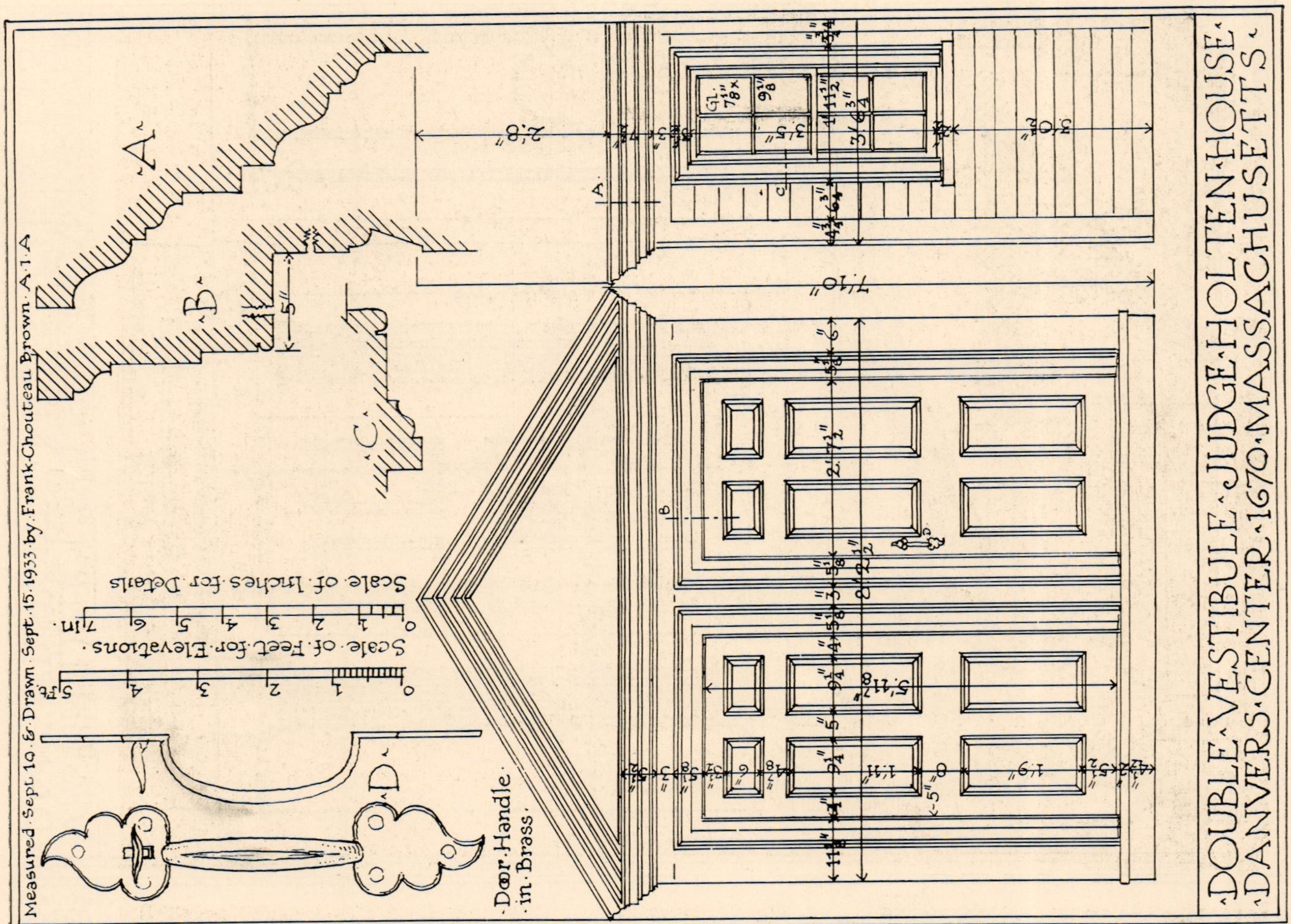


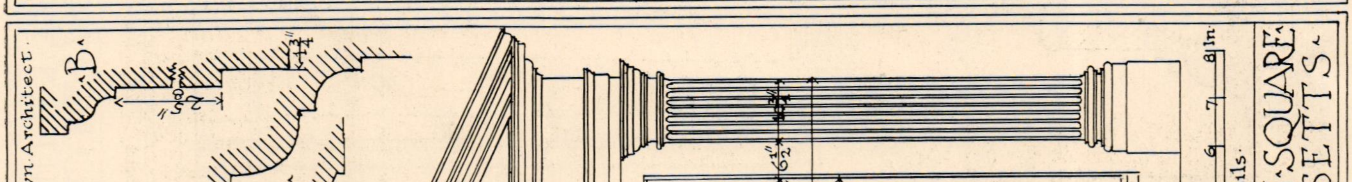
SIDE VESTIBULE—HOUSE ON WASHINGTON SQUARE
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



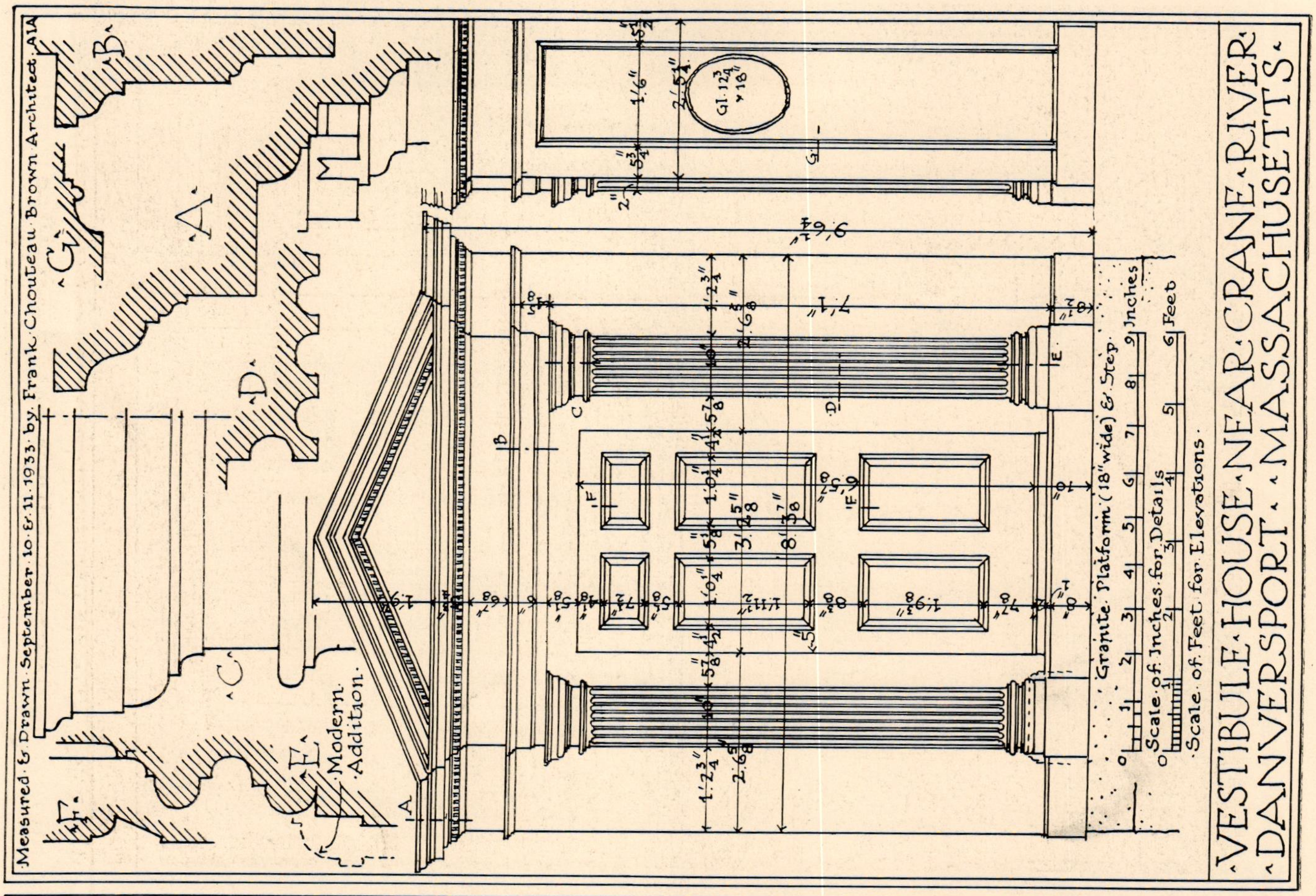
DOUBLE VESTIBULE—JUDGE HOLTEN HOUSE, 1670
DANVERS CENTER, MASSACHUSETTS

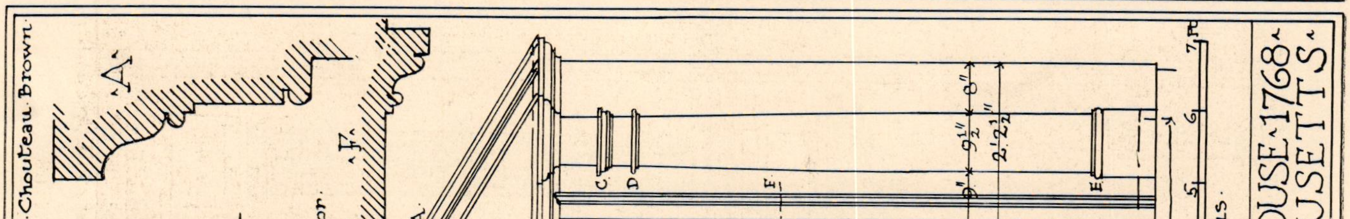
[136]


Measured Sept 10 & Drawn Sept 15 1933 by Frank Chouteau Brown A.I.A
Door Handle in Brass
Scale of Feet for Elevations
Scale of Inches for Details
DOUBLE VESTIBULE JUDGE HOLTEN HOUSE
DANVERS CENTER 1670 MASSACHUSETTS

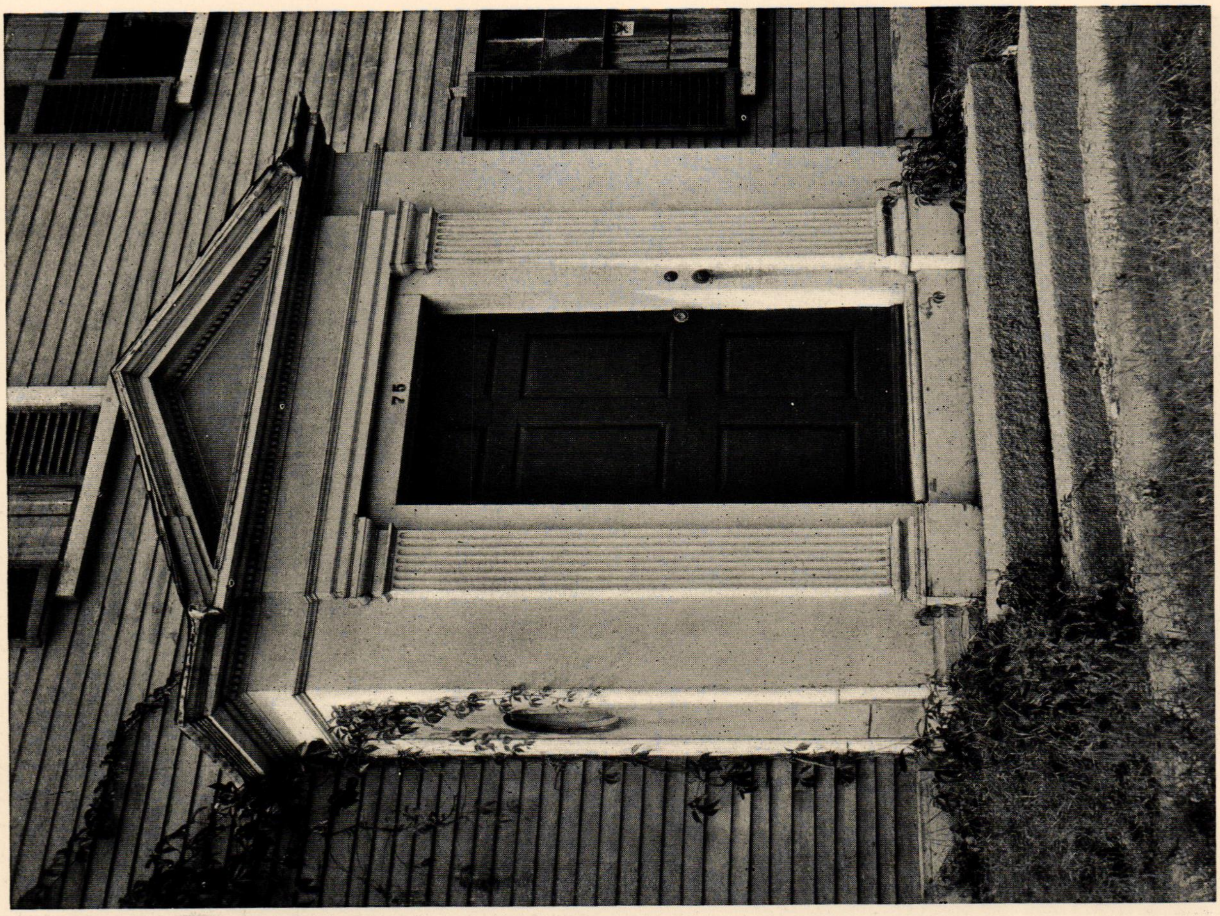

Measured & Drawn September 10 & 12 1933 by Frank Chouteau Brown Architect
Scale of Feet for Elevations.
Scale of Inches for Details.
SIDE VESTIBULE WASHINGTON SQUARE
SALEM MASSACHUSETTS

[137]

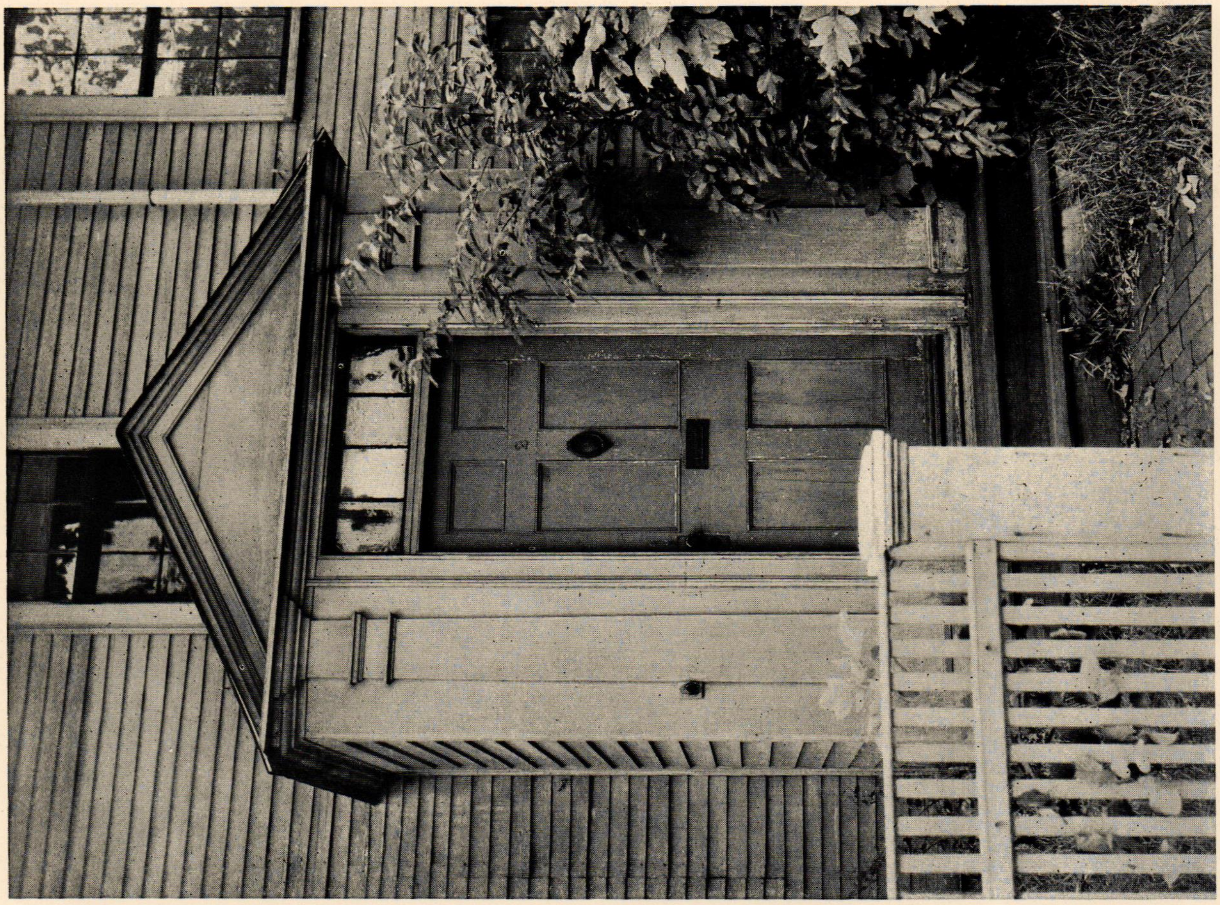

VESTIBULE·HOUSE·NEAR·CRANE·RIVER·
DANVERSPORT· MASSACHUSETTS·
Measured & Drawn. September 10 & 11. 1933. by. Frank. Chouteau. Brown Architect. AIA
Modern Addition.
Granite Platform (18" wide) & Step.
Scale of Inches for Details
Scale of Feet for Elevations


VESTIBULE·JONATHAN·BROOKS·HOUSE·1768·
WEST·MEDFORD·MASSACHUSETTS·
Measured August. 31. & Drawn. September. 9. 1933 by. Frank. Chouteau. Brown
Not Original
Door
Added Piece
Modern Wood Steps
Scale of Inches for Details. Scale of Feet for Elevations.

[138]



VESTIBULE—HOUSE NEAR CRANE RIVER
DANVERSPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

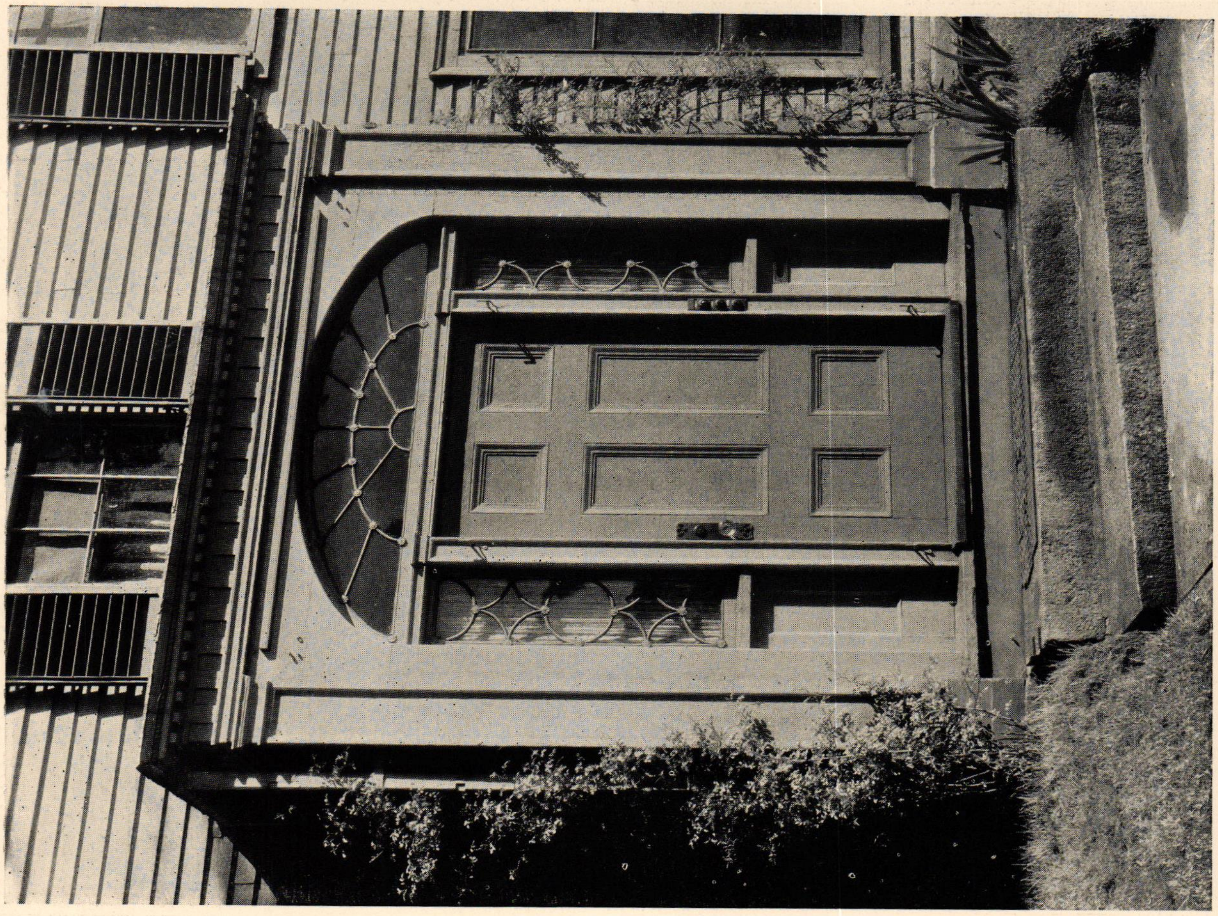


VESTIBULE—JONATHAN BROOKS HOUSE—1768
WEST MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

[139]

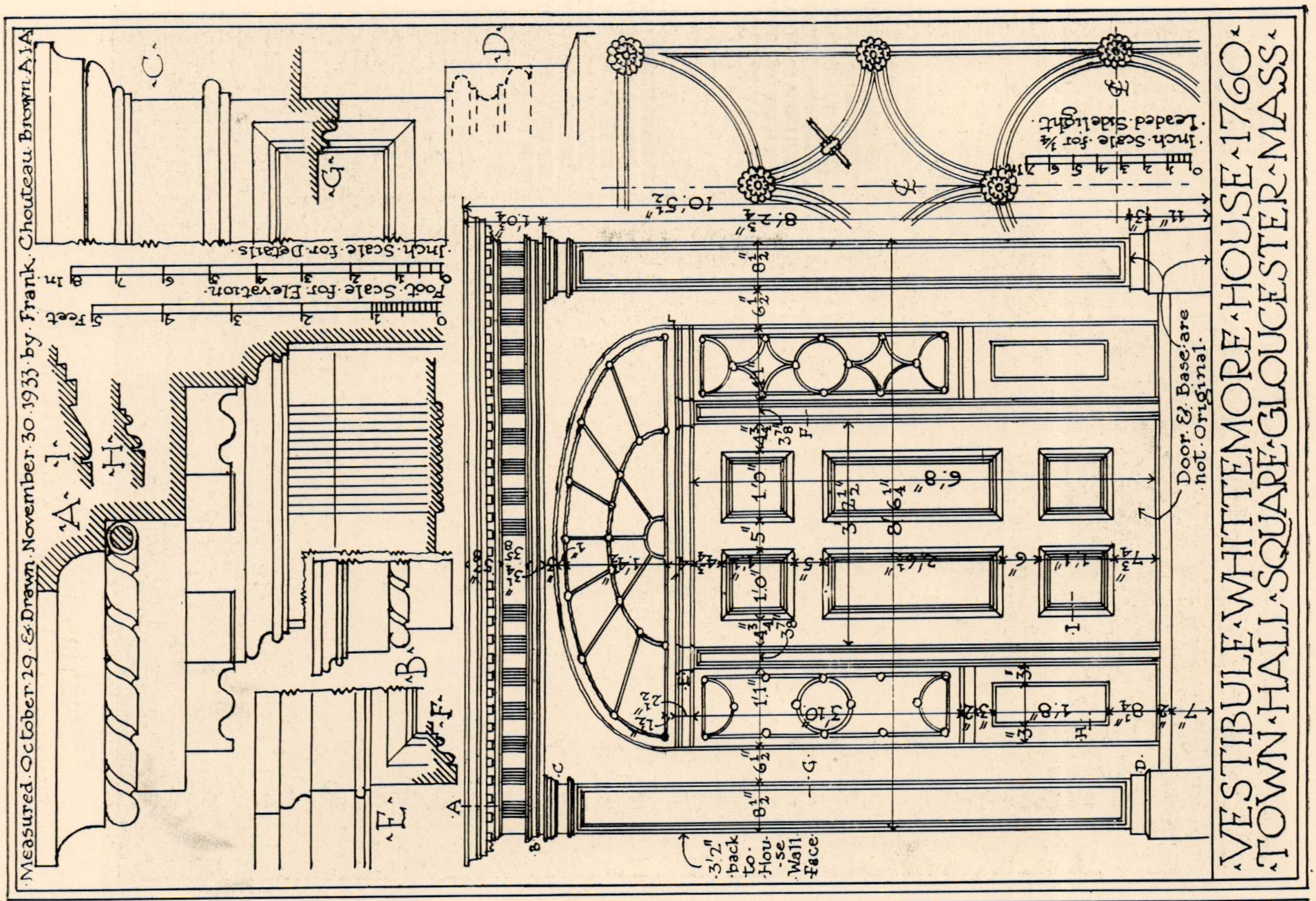


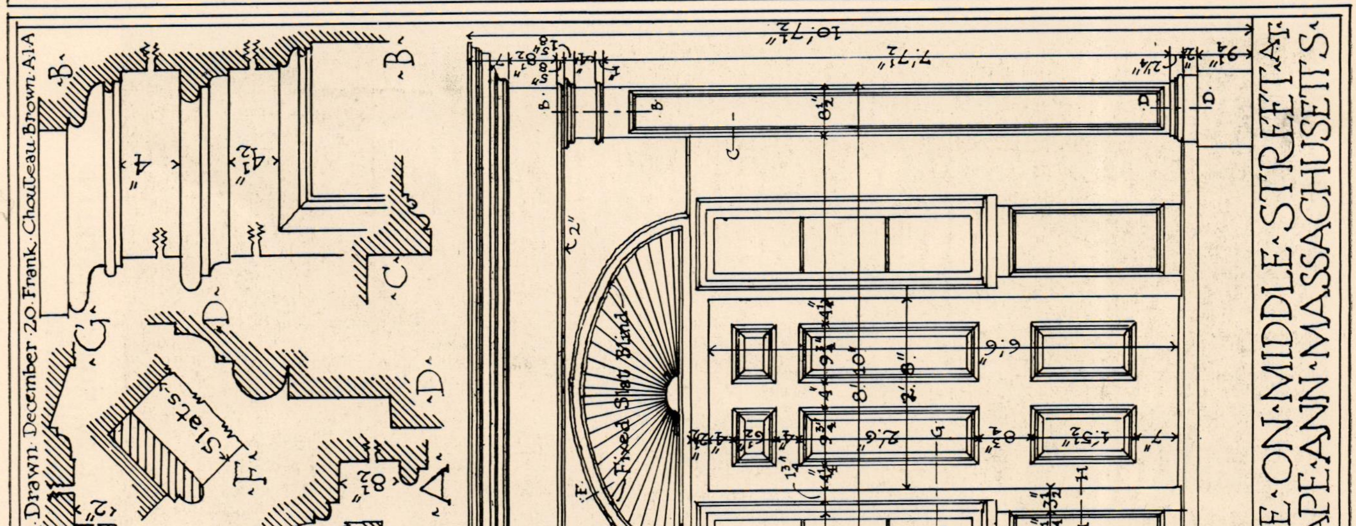
VESTIBULE—HOUSE ON MIDDLE STREET
GLOUCESTER, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS



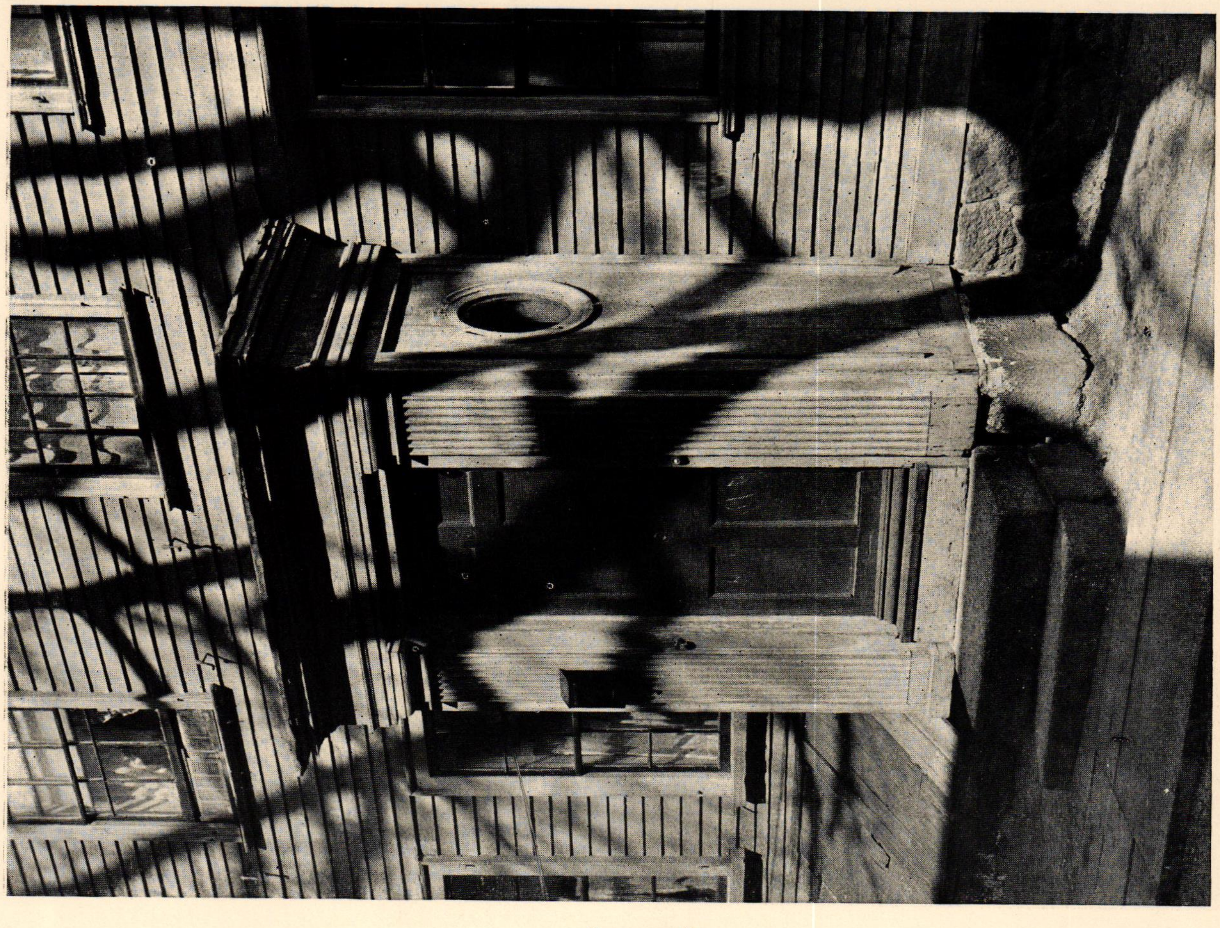
VESTIBULE—WHITTEMORE HOUSE—1760
TOWN HALL SQUARE, GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

[140]


Vestibule · Whittemore · House · 1760 ·
· Town · Hall · Square · Gloucester · Mass ·
Measured October 29 & Drawn November 30 1933 by Frank Chouteau Brown AIA
Foot Scale for Elevation
Inch Scale for Details
Door & Base are not Original
Leaded Sidelight
3'2" back to House Wall Face


· Vestibule · House · on · Middle · Street · at ·
· Gloucester · Cape · Ann · Massachusetts ·
Measured October 29 1933 & Drawn December 20 Frank Chouteau Brown AIA
Fixed Slat Blind
Slats
Foot Scale for Elevation
Inch Scale for Details

[141]

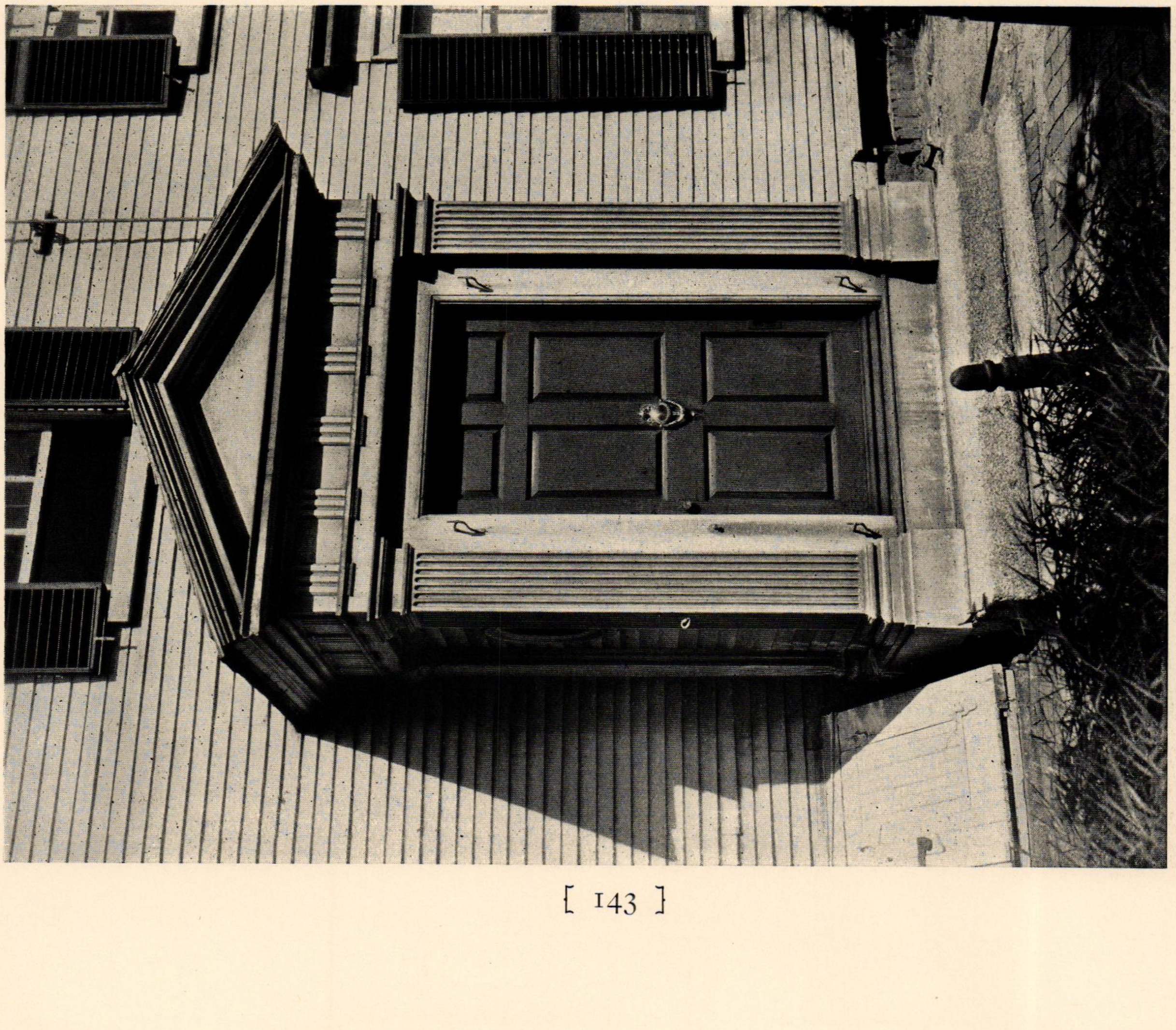


VESTIBULE—HOUSE AT 26 NORMAN STREET
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



VESTIBULE—SAMUEL BROCKELBANK HOUSE—1670
GEORGETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

[142]

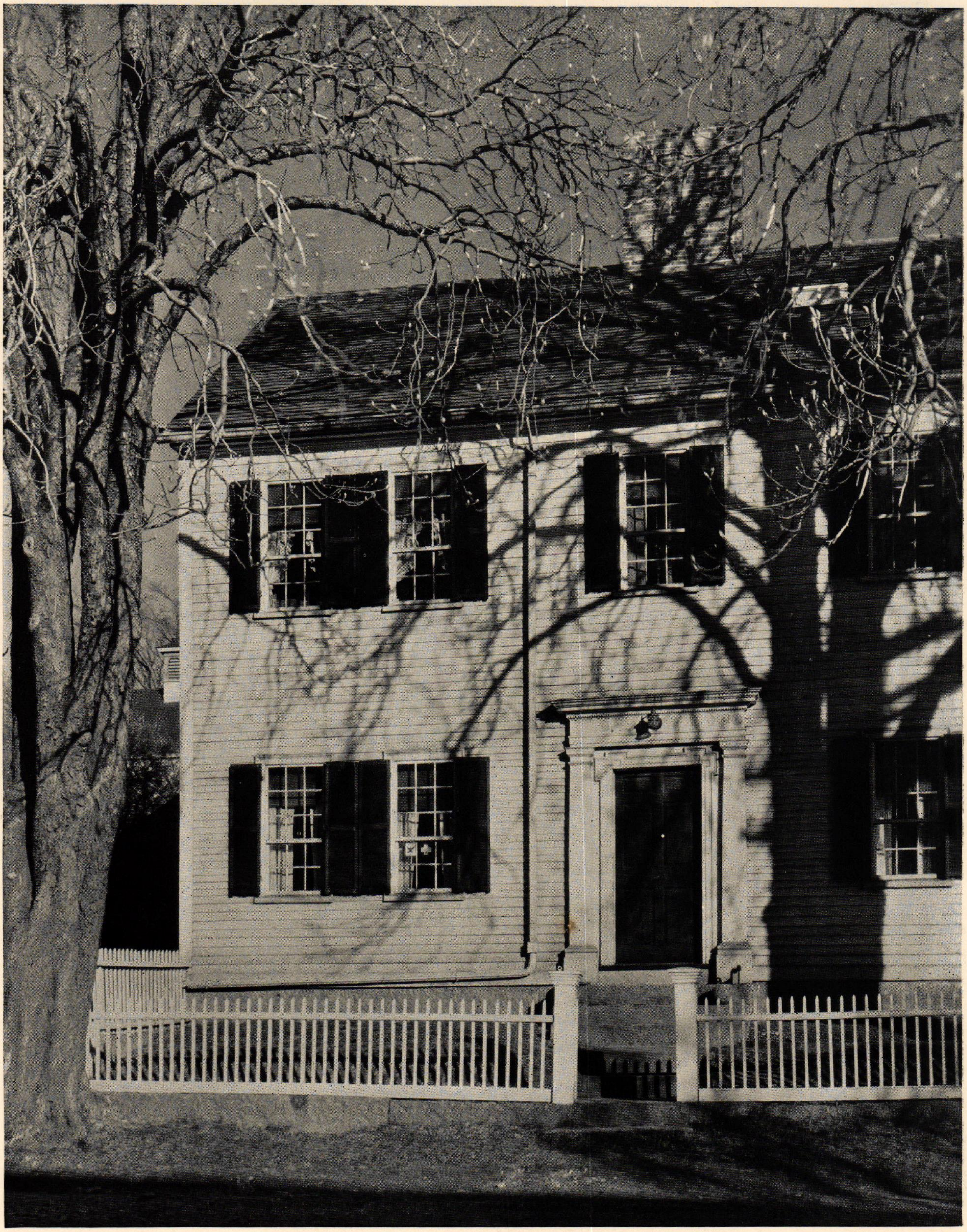


VESTIBULE—PEIRCE-NICHOLS HOUSE—1782—SAMUEL McINTIRE
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



VESTIBULE—HOUSE, NO. 23 SUMMER STREET
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

[143]



GEORGE GOTT HOUSE—1805—NINE GOTT STREET, ROCKPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

[144]